



Ambassador John Berry – Battle of the Coral Sea Commemoration - 2015

**Ambassador Berry's Remarks
at the Battle of the Coral Sea Commemoration Service
Field Marshal Sir Thomas Blamey Square, Canberra**

(As prepared for delivery – May 7, 2015)

There are turning points in history – where the Fates hold all in the balance – and test the mettle of each individual with blast furnace intensity.

In May of 1942 – Japan was undefeated, and sought to secure its Pacific expansion by taking Port Moresby and destroying our Allied Naval forces. The anvil was the Coral Sea – the cost – the loss of the carrier and many crew of the USS Lexington: 216 of the 2,951 crew went down with the ship, along with 36 aircraft. The carrier Yorktown was also hit by a bomb that penetrated four decks before exploding – killing 66 and causing severe structural damage. She was sufficiently patched to join the battle of Midway – where she played a critical role in sinking two Japanese carriers before being sunk herself. And so, the Yorktown turned the tide, at not one, but two critical Pacific battles.

In fact, the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway were a critical one-two punch that turned the tide of the entire Pacific War. Combined, at both battles Japan lost five fleet carriers, the core of their naval offensive force – and thereby lost the strategic initiative and offensive leadership in the Pacific.

The Japanese were forced to try and take Port Moresby by land – where they were halted by the brave Australian 14th Brigade. Without the success achieved at the Battle of the Coral Sea – the future of the war could have been dramatically different. 656 Americans and Australians gave their all at this fateful moment in history. Thousands more sailed and flew, bravely facing flames, smoke and sea to achieve victory. They turned the tide for freedom.



President Obama writes:

“I send warm greetings to the people of Australia as we commemorate the 73rd anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea.

In May of 1942, the United States and Australia joined together and took to the air and sea to hold back our wartime enemy and protect the values for which our nations stand. Determined to defend the region and freedom’s cause, brave women and men fought – and many gave their lives – so that we might know a safer, more just world.

From the Battle of the Coral Sea emerged a lasting partnership between American and Australia. Today, our countries continue to strengthen a bond that has endured through shared challenges over the decades, and we reflect on the events that have united us in common purpose. We also celebrate the moment that forged our formal alliance: the signing of the ANZUS Treaty. Still standing as a pillar of peace in the Asia-Pacific region, this accord reminds us of our obligation to uphold the freedom our service members have stood shoulder-to-shoulder to defend all over the world.

As we observe the anniversary of the Battle of the Coral Sea and honor the sacrifices of those who gave their last full measure of devotion, let us recommit to ensuring a future of peace and prosperity for all people.”

In closing, we must ensure that the memory of those who endured hardship and sacrifice during the pivotal battle never fades. We are honored to have with us today two Coral Sea veterans – Mr. Gordon Johnson and Mr. Derek Holyoake, who I would ask to come forward to receive a flag flown over our Embassy as a token of our thanks for their bravery and service.

Lest we forget.